

ENTRANCE TO THE OLD PALACE, SEOUL

Korea and her Emperor

BY ALFRED STEAD

KOREA, the cockpit of the Far East, and the nation which has given to Japan many of her finer arts, has a capital as fascinating and dirty and as incomprehensible as one would expect the cradle of such a past history to be. Seoul, the theatre of all political action, is a drab-colored even sea of thatched roofs, held within bounds by tall gray walls. Dirty, uneven lanes and alleyways divide the clusters of one-storied houses, and only the green-clad enclosures of the imperial palaces, and the legations with their foreign architecture, break the monotonous stretch of the city. The American and the British legations are almost within the Palace enclosure; the house of Mr. McLeary Brown is quite so. The Russian legation occupies a small hill overlooking and commanding the Palace. It is much more prominent than any other building, except perhaps the Catholic cathedral. The Japanese legation with its barracks is far from the present residence of the Emperor, being near the Old Palace,—which accounts perhaps for the Emperor's abandonment of it some years ago, when during the trouble with the Japanese the

Empress was killed by their hand, and a year after the Emperor escaped to the Russian legation, living there twelve months under Russian protection. When the disturbances were over, he took up his residence in the present, or, as it is called, the New Palace, which was formerly the residence of the Regent, his father. Every now and then the Emperor sends notes to the American and British ministers politely inquiring when they are going to move out into other quarters, because he does not wish their presence so near the Palace. They answer, equally politely, that they were there when he came to this Palace, so it is for him to move if he is not comfortable, and the legations remain.

At four o'clock every morning the Emperor retires to rest and the town wakes up. This latter because at that hour detachments of troops march round and round the Palace to the sound of drums and bugle—always the same notes over and over again. This goes on for about an hour, the men playing vigorously and marching well, and then the work of the army is over for the day. I was unable to discover what was the reason

of this display, unless it was to show the foreign ministers that Korea has an army. During the rest of the morning there is nothing stirring in or near the Palace. About mid-day, however, the officials begin to arrive, and many change into their court dress before the Great Gate. Attended by a servant who carries a bundle in a cloth, they there leisurely and in full view of the public eye don their green gauze garments of state over their every-day ones, and change their hats for court head-gear. Then they enter the gate; on coming out the same procedure is gone through, only *vice versa*. The military officers pass in or come out of a side gate near the barracks. It is very amusing to see these officers, whose rank renders riding necessary, being hoisted upon the diminutive horses, and then jolted away, held in the saddle by two or more privates. Later in the afternoon come those persons having audience, in their green imperial chairs, and pass straight into the Palace enclosure. At night the sounds of feasting and Korean music escape from the Palace, and continue until well into the morning. The audience-room and most prized portion of the Palace is contained in a modern stone and brick building, standing in one corner of the enclosure and intensely out of place.

Li Hsi, the Emperor of Korea, is the twenty-eighth sovereign of his dynasty—a dynasty that usurped the throne of Korea some 300 years ago. The Emperor is regarded by his people as God, and his slightest word carries great weight with the lower classes. Although possessing enormous potential power, he has little actual opportunity, and has to play a careful part amongst the international wrangles that forever disturb his court.

Owing to the late habits of the Emperor, and the audiences being held in the afternoon, ours was fixed for five o'clock. Shortly before that hour we left the legation in the imperial chairs sent for us. These chairs are like the old palanquins in shape, with seats, and are colored green inside and out; the ordinary Korean chairs have no seats, and necessitate sitting on the floor. Our chairs were carried by four men, two before and two behind. Accompanied by the minister and interpreter, we were

borne along, past the walls with their soldiers, past sentries and machine-guns, to one of the gates of the Palace, where we left our chairs, and entered, after passing the gate, a small anteroom, close to the audience-chamber. The interpreter was a Europeanized Korean, clad in black frock-coat, and with his smug and greasy face surmounted by a venerable silk hat. The antechamber is contained in an old Korean house; it is very small, and Europeanized into extreme ugliness. Electric light was installed, and there was a gaudy French carpet on the floor. A beautiful Korean chair was crowded into obscurity by hideous European substitutes. The table was covered with a flaring table-cloth. The only appropriate thing which civilization had brought into that ugly room, and one which was also most apposite, was a large American stove, with the word "Invader" writ large upon its front. There were no windows, but over the openings hung Korean bamboo curtains, very fine and light.

In this room were many Korean officials, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Ceremonies. After universal hand-shaking we sat down and were offered refreshments. These took the shape of Egyptian cigarettes and Japanese mineral water in large glasses. The robes of the court officials were of dark green gauze, flowing as do all Korean garments. Their head-dress was made of curious black gauze, with gauze wings projecting to right and left behind. Nearly all the officials wore great belts, very beautiful in the case of the higher dignitaries. This belt is quite stiff, and composed of metal and stones; it does not fit tightly, but being fastened close to the body at the back, it projects considerably over the wearer's chest. Most of the ministers spoke only Korean, but we were surprised to find one who spoke excellent French, and another who was master of a little English. We conversed with the former during the few minutes' delay in the anteroom, and found him remarkably well informed and intelligent. He told us that he had never been outside Korea, but had learned French by himself. We discussed the coronation of the King of England, and then drifted on to the electric cars of Seoul, recently installed

by an American firm. The official was quite distressed about the latter, because they did so much harm to the Korean children. These, having always been accustomed to play in the streets, could not understand these things which came so quickly and so quietly, and many had been maimed and killed. It was quite touching to hear him talk of the children, and he spoke with great fluency and intelligence.

The few minutes' delay which we experienced was due to the fact that the Emperor was taking a bath. The weather was stiflingly hot, and it is the imperial custom to spend most of the intervals between audiences in his bath-tub, under such conditions keeping cool.

Soon, word having come that the Emperor was in his audience-chamber, we followed the ministers for Foreign Affairs and Ceremonies through a glass-covered way into the main Palace building: this is quite new and in modern style. As we were passing through the passage we caught a glimpse of some women and children. These, being of the imperial household, are never allowed to go beyond the outer wall. The women did not appear striking, and shared to the full the general Korean feminine complaint of ugliness.

Having entered the main building, we passed through two small modern rooms, unfurnished except for flaring carpets of European manufacture. At the thresh-

old of the second room the officials all prostrated themselves, and again as we passed into the audience-chamber. From the second room we turned at right angles



THE EMPEROR OF KOREA

to the left, and passing through an ordinary doorway, entered the audience-chamber, and found ourselves in the imperial presence! It was a shock, yet hardly in the expected sense; everything was so small, so unmajestic, and, above all, so un-Oriental. Imagine a small, wooden, square room, the walls papered with bad French paper, the ceiling whitewashed, a glaring red and green carpet on the floor, and cheap-looking lace curtains draping an ordinary glass window. To add to the general depressing effect, there

were two cheaply framed chromos hanging on the wall behind the Emperor.

The Emperor himself was at the farther end of the room from the doorway, standing behind a plain modern table, unornamented except for a monstrosity of a table-cover. On his left hand stood the Crown-Prince. We advanced to the table after the momentary pause of as-

stoutness. His face is very pleasant and full of smiles, quite in contrast to that of the Crown-Prince, whose face is impassive, not to say imbecille. The Emperor shook hands with Mrs. Stead and then with me, quite in Occidental style. A curious incident arose, however, as we were withdrawing our hands across the table. A look of distress crossed the

Crown - Prince's face, and he grabbed back the departing hands and shook them vigorously. The Crown-Prince always wishes to do whatever the Emperor does, and thus the moment his father's hand leaves yours he grasps it and shakes it too.

The Emperor was wearing a loose robe of yellow silk, beautifully embroidered with golden dragons in a circle on his chest. The imperial belt is of gold with yellow opaque stones, and projects several inches from the Emperor's breast. On his arms and on his chest and back the Emperor wears the thin Korean woven bamboo guards or shields, to hold the clothes from touching the skin in hot weather. These help to give him an appearance of stoutness greater than



THE CROWN-PRINCE OF KOREA

tonishment, and the interpreter took up his position at our left hand. The Emperor gave the only suggestions of Oriental splendor, and it seemed pitifully out of place in such surroundings. Li Hsi is of medium height and inclined to

the reality. The imperial head-dress is a two-tiered purple gauze one, very similar to those worn in olden times in Japan. After the Korean army was first organized, the Emperor abandoned his customary robes and donned a gorgeous

military uniform when he held audiences. He, however, insisted upon wearing his helmet when receiving the foreign ministers, and they, naturally not tolerating such a thing, retaliated, by threatening to retain their own hats if he would not doff his when wearing European clothes. This was obviously impossible, as it is quite out of the possibility of forgiveness for a Korean gentleman to be without a head-covering in public, and so the Emperor had to abandon his uniform and go back to the ancient robes and head-gear. His Majesty was wearing the large Korean decoration called the Golden Measure on his left breast. This decoration received the name from Mr. Gubbins, the British minister in Seoul. The more accurate rendering of the Korean title would be the "Golden Rule," but Mr. Gubbins held that that name was already appropriated. The Emperor wore, beneath the Korean decoration, the Japanese Order of the Rising Sun.

The Emperor laughed very often and was most pleasant, conversing quite animatedly with us through the interpreter. After the introduction he inquires after our health, and says that he is glad that we have come to his country. We reply that we trust his Majesty is enjoying good health. He asks then if we came from Japan, and how many states we have visited before Korea. Our reply, out of deference for the Emperor's lack of geographical knowledge, that we have visited a great many is not definite enough for his Majesty, and the interpreter promptly renders it as eight states! Our intention of travelling through Manchuria and Siberia surprises the Emperor, and he says that it is a very great undertaking, and the change from the charming life of Seoul will be great. We converse about the coronation of King Edward next year, and hope that he will send an embassy on that occasion. The Emperor assures us that he is only waiting for the official announcement of the date to reach Seoul, in order to appoint a special representative. He also informs us that he has just despatched ministers to America, Great Britain, Germany, and France. This seems to afford him the keenest satisfaction. These were the principal topics of our conversation, in which the

Crown-Prince takes no part. The robes of the Crown-Prince are red, with dark green around his neck, where the undergarments appear; his belt is also red, and his head-dress is of purple gauze, similar to the Emperor's. He sways from side to side as he stands, and it is evident that his legs cannot support him, unless he also has the table to lean upon.

The audience at an end, the Emperor again shakes hands, as does the Crown-Prince, and smilingly bids us a good journey. The officials prostrate themselves, and we bow as we leave the audience-chamber. The feeling uppermost in our minds as we leave the imperial presence is one of pity for the smiling old man, the God of his people, and the puppet of ambitious nations. One cannot help being sorry for him, there in his little room, as ugly as civilization can make it. Following this feeling of pity comes a certainty that the Emperor must be able to gain a great deal of amusement out of his position in the centre of affairs. It must be good to see the intrigues and counter-intrigues of the different ministers, and there is plenty of evidence that he is not without shrewdness and humor.

Our audience over, we returned to the anteroom and sat down again, while the minister had some more conversation with the Emperor. Warm champagne was served out to every one, and the conversation was resumed where it had been interrupted by the audience. While our attention was divided between the different ministers and dignitaries brought forward to meet us, one or other of the Korean lower officials drank our champagne! We did not notice this until later on, when the health of the Emperor was proposed, and everybody else had champagne to drink it in except the foreigners. The minister was much amused, because, as he explained later, even the sip that etiquette demands one shall drink with the toast is a *bête noire* to those having frequent audiences, because the court orders up specially bad Chinese champagne for occasions like this. After a farewell universal hand-shaking we left the Palace, and were borne away in our green chairs to the legation. The next day we received a bundle of imperial fans. These were plain wood and

plain paper, but beautifully and artistically made, and formed a pleasant memento of our meeting with the Emperor.

In the evening there was the dinner in the Palace. This was served in European style. The Emperor and the Crown-Prince are never present at these dinners, but nevertheless they take a keen interest in them, sharing to the full the general Korean curiosity. On more than one occasion the Crown-Prince was to be seen peering through the crack of the door. The instant he saw that some of the guests perceived him there was heard the rustling of his silken robes as he rapidly withdrew. After the long banquet was over, the dancing-girls of the imperial household came in ready for their work. These are intensely ugly and not graceful—many of them are marked with small-pox. The music is very discordant and loud, and the dancing has none of the grace to be found in that of

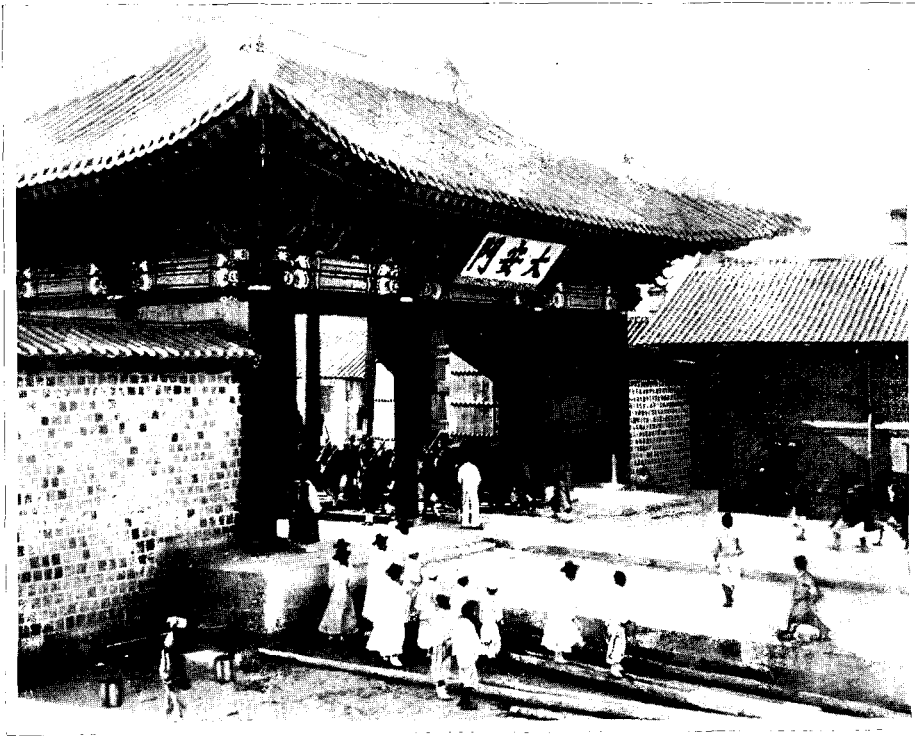
the geishas of Japan. The dancing is continued for a long time, and much drink is consumed. At last the dancers are wearied, and the time of departure has come. The Emperor and his court, however, do not retire for several hours yet, and continue to employ themselves. Although the music for the dances is so discordant, there are trained Korean bands, trained by a German instructor, formerly in the Japanese service.

As we have indicated before, the Emperor is always anxious that the legations shall move away from near his Palace; and recently, when there was much friction with Great Britain, and many British war-ships were at Chemulpo, the Emperor met the British minister one day at an audience. He told him, smiling sweetly, what a pity it was that he had not a larger house, so that the British officers could come and stay in Seoul—then the Koreans might be able to see them. Would he not like to have a nice large house built outside the Palace, where he would have more room?

At another time, when heated audiences were being held, the British minister was surprised to receive the visit of a Korean of high rank, who announced that he had been appointed as minister to the Court of St. James! He further said that the Emperor had sent him to ask a small favor. London being so far away, it was difficult and risky to send money all that way. Would it not be easy to arrange matters so that he could receive Mr. Gubbins's salary from the British Foreign Office, while Mr. Gubbins was paid in Seoul by the Korean Minister of Foreign Affairs? Then there would be no necessity for the sending of money. Such actions on the part of the Emperor seem to indicate that he takes a keen interest in the



KOREAN WOMAN IN STREET DRESS, WITH GIRL



VISITORS ENTERING THE PALACE GATE

game of state, and can take advantage of an opening whenever it presents itself.

The Emperor scarcely ever stirs out of his Palace. He is supposed to make a royal progress through Seoul once each year, but does not always do so. This progress is gorgeous with all the tawdry display of Orientalism tinged with Occidental ideas wrongly understood. The most magnificent thing about this display is the bill which is presented to the Treasury to defray expenses. Sometimes this amounts to as much as 700,000 yen (\$350,000) for the one day's entertainment—a vast amount when the purchasing power of a yen is considered. Few or no details are given, and when they are they often partake of the nature of a farce. Such is the item of champagne for the foreign representatives, which figured once at 70,000 yen (\$35,000)! Of course most of these vast sums are misappropriated, and the Emperor has his share. He also has another source of revenue which is very profitable.

This is the sale of patents for coining money to private individuals. The right to coin five-sen ($2\frac{1}{2}$ cents) nickel pieces is the usual one granted. The purchaser pays down 8000 yen (\$4000), and he receives the privilege of coining nickels, for which privilege he pays additionally 4000 yen (\$2000) monthly. This in itself is good business for the Emperor, but he has improved upon it, and, by a system of stopping all patents periodically, he obtains frequent repayments of the initial premium! It is said also that the Emperor has recently ordered two million five-sen pieces in the United States. Of these the actual cost will be one cent (two sen) each, leaving him with a profit of some \$30,000. Mention must also be made of the sale of concessions to foreigners. These frequently cost the concessionnaires more than they are worth, but this is not always so, as may be seen by the following instance, which was told us in Seoul:

A British official having died in Korea, the court was given to understand,

Heaven alone knows why, that some compensation should be awarded the widow. She therefore was given the post of governess to the Crown-Prince, with an official salary. It is said that during the three years of her governess-ship she never once saw the Crown-Prince, as a pupil; nevertheless her engagement for another term of three years has been arranged for.

The Old Palace of the Emperor of Korea lies at some distance from the smaller New Palace, and close to the hill of Pouk Han, of which hill tradition says that when the last tree is gone from its surface the end of Korea is at hand. It is because of this tradition that it is death for any one to cut wood on Pouk Han. There are still many trees left standing, but on the summit there remains only one tree, solitary and rugged, and this gives the impression that the prophecy is not far from fulfilment. The deserted Palace at the foot of the hill seems to emphasize this feeling. The royal enclosure covers many acres of ground, and its walls run far into the hills, including at least one wooded valley. Numberless buildings, lakes, inner walls, and court-yards are scattered over the enclosed area, giving the whole the aspect rather of a scattered city than of a single palace. It must be remembered that formerly there inhabited this enclosure some 400 guards, 2000 retainers, as well as all the royal household. These would require many buildings to house them all.

The main entrance lies at the end of one of the largest streets of Seoul, and presents a most imposing spectacle, viewed down the vista of widely separated low houses. This gateway is, however, never opened now; it used to be the gate through which the King and his family alone passed. The road leading up to the gate is decorated with two quaint figures of lions in stone. Admittance is now obtained by permission of the Minister of Ceremonies, and the gate open for every-day use lies on another side of the enclosure from that of the main entrance. At the gate, which rises gradually from the wall until it has quite an imposing height, there are several Korean policemen, in pseudo-Japanese uniform, which they wear with the grace

of the unexpected. There are no soldiers guarding the Old Palace, only these police, who act also as guides. In the latter capacity their principal use is to unlock the various doors, since they can only speak Korean and a little Japanese. The ceiling of the gateway is decorated with gayly printed dragons, which seem to have stood the weather wonderfully well without fading.

Inside the wall all is uncared-for and desolate. The brilliant Chinese coloring of the various buildings seems only to accentuate the desertion and pathos of the overgrown court-yards and the bird-defiled monuments of former greatness. An intricate winding walk of several minutes through corridors and along side walls leads to the great court-yard, in the midst of which stands the great Throne Room. This building is reached by several flights of steps, and is raised above the court-yard on two terraces. The gates having been unlocked by the Korean policeman-guide, entrance is gained immediately into the vast building, and the visitor stands amazed at the grandiose simplicity and vastness of the hall. The hall seems empty, save for the great red wooden pillars resting upon their white dressed stone supports. The ceiling and lofty roof are brilliantly decorated. The floor is covered with rotting matting and rubbish and the dust of years.

Immediately opposite the main entrance is the royal dais, seemingly removed from the rest of the hall by its supporting pillars, and reached by six steps. On this dais stands the royal throne, before a beautifully carved and decorated screen. This, as the throne itself, is in red lacquer. Behind the screen again is a painted picture, retaining all its pristine vigor of coloring. Above the throne is a gorgeously decorated ceiling, upon which the Korean dragons variously disport themselves. Seated on this throne the King could look out over the terraces and the court-yard, and see all his gathered nobles and officials, close to the presence or farther removed, as befitted their rank.

The Throne Room is so splendidly massive in its simple grandeur that it is easy to imagine it as it used to be in its days of really royal audiences.

THE
DESERTED
VILLAGE

PICTURES BY
EDWIN A. ABBEY, R.A.

THE DESERTED VILLAGE

The sober herd that low'd to meet their young,
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,
The playful children just let loose from school,
The watch-dog's voice that bay'd the whispering wind,
And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind—
These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,
And fill'd each pause the nightingale had made.
But now the sounds of population fail,
No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,
No busy steps the grass-grown footway tread.
For all the bloomy flush of life is fled—
All but yon widow'd, solitary thing
That feebly bends beside the plashy spring;
She, wretched matron—forc'd in age, for bread,
To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,
To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,
To seek her nightly shed, and weep till morn—
She only left of all the harmless train,

The sober herd that low'd to meet their young



2. F. A. M., 1902, by Harper & Brothers

The sad historian of the pensive plain!

Near yonder copse, where once the garden smil'd,
And still where many a garden-flower grows wild—
There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,
The village preacher's modest mansion rose.
A man he was to all the country dear;
And passing rich with forty pounds a-year.
Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
Nor e'er had chang'd, nor wish'd to change, his place;
Unpractic'd he to fawn, or seek for power
By doctrines fashion'd to the varying hour.
Far other aims his heart had learn'd to prize—
More skill'd to raise the wretched than to rise.
His house was known to all the vagrant train;
He chid their wanderings, but reliev'd their pain:
The long remember'd beggar was his guest,
Whose beard descending swept his aged breast;
The ruin'd spendthrift, now no longer proud,
Claim'd kindred here, and had his claims allow'd;
The broken soldier, kindly bade to stay,

The sad historian of the pensive plain



3. Copyright, 1907, by Harper & Brothers

Sat by his fire, and talk'd the night away—
Wept o'er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,
Shoulder'd his crutch and show'd how fields were won.
Pleas'd with his guests, the good man learn'd to glow,
And quite forgot their vices in their woe;
Careless their merits or their faults to scan,
His pity gave ere charity began.

Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,
And even his failings lean'd to virtue's side—
But in his duty, prompt at every call,
He watch'd and wept, he pray'd and felt for all:
And, as a bird each fond endearment tries
To tempt its new-fledg'd offspring to the skies,
He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,
Allur'd to brighter worlds, and led the way.

Beside the bed where parting life was laid,
And sorrow, guilt, and pain by turns dismay'd,
The reverend champion stood: at his control
Despair and anguish fled the struggling soul;
Comfort came down the trembling wretch to raise,
And his last faltering accents whisper'd praise.

Beside the bed where parting life was laid

Love-Letters of Falstaff

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

I T was, indeed, Sir John Falstaff; very old now, and very shaky after a night of hard drinking. He came into the room singing, as was often his custom when alone, and found Bardolph bending over the chest, while Mistress Quickly demurely stirred the fire, which winked at the old knight very knowingly.

"Then came the bold Sir Caradoc," carolled Sir John. "Ah, mistress, what news?—And eke Sir Pellinore.—Did I rage last night, Bardolph? Was I a very Bedlamite?"

"As mine own bruises can testify," asserted Bardolph. "Had each one of them a tongue, they might raise a clamor whereby Babel were as an heir weeping for his rich uncle's death; their testimony would qualify you for any mad-house in England. And if their evidence go against the doctor's stomach, the watchman at the corner hath three teeth—or, rather, had until you knocked them out last night—that will, right willingly, aid him to digest it."

"Three, say you?" asked the knight, sinking into his great chair set ready for him beside the fire. "I would have my valor in all men's mouths, but not in this fashion; 'tis too biting a jest. I am glad it was no worse; I have a tender conscience, and that mad fellow of the north, Hotspur, sits heavily upon it; thus, Percy being slain, is *per se* avenged; a plague on him! We fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock, but I gave no quarter, I promise you; though, i' faith, the jest is ill-timed. Three, say you? I would to God my name were not so terrible to the enemy as it is; I would I had 'bated my natural inclination somewhat, and slain less tall fellows by some threescore. I doubt Agamemnon slept not well o' nights. Three, say you? Give the fellow a crown apiece for his mouldy teeth, an thou hast them; an thou hast not, bid him eschew drunkenness,

whereby his misfortune hath befallen him."

"Indeed, sir," began Bardolph, "I doubt—"

"Doubt not, sirrah!" cried Sir John, testily. "Was not the apostle reproved for that same sin? Thou art a very Didymus, Bardolph;—a very incredulous paynim, a most unspeculative rogue! Have I carracks trading i' the Indies? Have I robbed the exchequer of late? Have I the Golden Fleece for a cloak? Sooth, 'tis very paltry gimlet; and that augurs not well for his suit. Does he take me for a raven to feed him in the wilderness? Tell him there are no such ravens hereabouts; else had I long since lined the house-tops and set springes in the gutters. Inform him, knave, that my purse is no better lined than his own broken costard; 'tis void as a beggar's protestations, or a butcher's stall in Lent; light as a famished gnat, or the sighing of a new-made widower; more empty than a last year's bird-nest, than a madman's eye, or, in fine, than the friendship of a king."

"But you have wealthy friends, Sir John," suggested the hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern, who had been waiting with considerable impatience for an opportunity to join in the conversation.

"Friends, dame?" asked the knight, and cowered closer to the fire, as though he were a little cold. "I have no friends since Hal is King. I had, I grant you, a few score of acquaintances whom I taught to play at dice; paltry young blades of the City, very unfledged juvenals! Setting my knighthood and my valor aside, if I did swear friendship with these, I did swear to a lie. 'Tis a censorious world: these sprouting aldermen, these bacon-fed rogues, have eschewed my friendship; my reputation hath grown somewhat more murky than Erebus; no matter! I walk alone, as one that hath the pestilence. No matter! but I grow